

## 10 • THE COLLECTIVE LIFE

182 relatives, soon caught up with them. Several cases of such elopements occurred  
 583 during the period of fieldwork, including the case of one young couple (Peanut  
 [629] and Jumbo's wife) who made repeated attempts to elope over a period of  
 several years. But despite the relaxation of standards that white contact had  
 brought, as long as they remained on the islands these violators of the system  
 were soon forced back into conformity by outraged public opinion and its  
 punitive sanctions. Unless he fled to the mainland with his girl, the young  
 bachelor who stole an old man's young wife had to restore her sooner or later  
 to her rightful husband. Under pre-white conditions they could not flee to the  
 mainland; if they tried, they both probably drowned on the way or at least  
 were never heard of again.

182 Thus the isolation of the Tiwi made the rule of the gerontocracy much  
 691 more absolute, and the enforcement of it much more effective than was possible  
 for any of the mainland tribes where violators of the rules could skip across  
 the border. Tiwi bachelors had to be satisfied, by and large, with casual and  
 temporary liaisons and even in these, because of the constant suspicion of the  
 old husbands and the constant spying and scandalmongering of the old wives,  
 they had to be prepared to be often caught and, when caught, to be punished.  
 [578] Thus we come to another of the main emphases in Tiwi culture—the enormous  
 frequency of disputes, fights, duels, and war parties arising directly or indirectly  
 out of cases of seduction. If we may call this area of life the legal area, then  
 over 90 percent of legal affairs were matters in which women were in some  
 way involved.

627 THE DUEL The Tiwi formula for handling seduction was very  
 684 straightforward and clear-cut in its formal outline. Since senior men had young  
 wives and young men had not, seduction was necessarily viewed as an offense  
 by a young man against a senior man. Hence the charge was always laid by  
 the senior and the younger man was always the defendant.<sup>1</sup> At night in camp  
 the accuser hurled his charges at the offender. We described earlier the alter-  
 natives available at this stage to both parties. Two of those alternatives were  
 for the old man to press the matter to a public "trial," either the next day, if  
 the camp was already a large one, or else on the next occasion when both men  
 were present in a big gathering.

The basic shape of all Tiwi trials was standardized in the form that we  
 have been calling the duel. Everybody present—men, women, children, and  
 dogs—formed a rough circle in an open space, sitting or standing according  
 to their degree of excitement at the moment. At one end stood the accuser,  
 [302] the old man, covered from head to foot in white paint, with his ceremonial  
 411 spears in one hand and a bundle of the more useful hunting spears in the

<sup>1</sup> Under pre-white conditions this had to be so. After the arrival of the Catholic missionaries, some young men through Mission manipulation got a young wife at an age that would have been impossible earlier. This resulted in an occasional case around the Mission where a young husband charged a man older than himself with seducing his wife. The resulting duel, with an older man as defendant, was regarded by the Tiwi as both embarrassing and ludicrous, perhaps analogous to the average American's attitude toward female professional wrestlers. (See Hart 1954 for a case of this sort, the duel of Bob v. Louis.)